S
352.0786
M44m5
1975

Montana Local Government In Review

STATE DOCUMENTS
JUL 29 '77

MONTANA STATE
COMMISSION ON LOCAL GOVERNMENT
Capitol Station
Helena, Montana 59601

(406) 449-2814

A Televised Discussion of
the Future of Montana's
Cities, Towns, and Counties,
October 14, 15, 1974

Occasional Papers in Local Government No. 5
BUREAU OF GOVERNMENT RESEARCH
University of Montana
Missoula, Montana 59801
June, 1975

MONTANA STATE LIBRARY
S 352.0786 M44u5 c.1
Montana local government in review :a te
3 0864 00022966 9

Montana Local Government In Review

A Televised Discussion of the Future of
Montana's Cities, Towns, and Counties
October 14, 15, 1974

Edited by
Lauren S. McKinsey and R. June Thornton

This televised discussion was funded by the Montana Committee for the Humanities. The preparation of this document was financed in part through a Comprehensive Planning Assistance Grant from the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, under the provisions of Section 701 of the Housing Act of 1954, as amended, to the Montana State Commission on Local Government.

INTRODUCTION

Montana's unique constitutional voter review requirement has created an unprecedented opportunity for citizens to design a new form of local government—or to legitimize their present form—in the period through 1976.

With the support of the Montana Committee for the Humanities, the Bureau of Government Research sponsored a forum series in eight Montana communities in the fall of 1974. The forums were designed to promote awareness of the issues involved in local government review and to foster dialogue among concerned citizens regarding the choices affecting the future of local communities.

The highlight of the forum series was a televised discussion, shown on the Montana Television Network, featuring noted political sociologist Scott Greer, an authority on the politics of local government transition, and three distinguished Montanans involved in different aspects of local government: Roland R. Renne, Dorothy Eck and Frank Bryan. Their discussion, recorded here, covered a number of current topics, ranging from the constitutional background of local government review to the prospects for change in Montana's local communities.

Professor Greer's extensive research in the area of local government modernization across the nation gave a broadened perspective to Montana's unique situation and emphasized possible solutions for Montana's urban areas. Frank Bryan's experience with the New England town meeting provided insight into a form of government untried in Montana but perhaps suitable in many small town communities. Dr. Renne's acknowledged expertise in the county manager form of government balanced the forum on the county government side. Dorothy Eck's background as a delegate to the constitutional convention, and her experience with local government on a day-to-day basis, helped blend theory and practice in the discussion.

Professor Greer spent three days in Montana speaking on the topic of local government review to several audiences, including a MCH forum in Missoula and a practical workshop in Great Falls. He was accompanied by his wife and colleague, Ann Greer, who is also a political sociologist and who contributed comparative dimensions on Montana's review. The Greers both concluded that the process is a unique and fascinating one which is being watched with interest by other states in the nation. It is hoped that this publication will help to create awareness of the historical significance of the event among the people of this state.

LAUREN McKINSEY
Project Director

FORUM PARTICIPANTS

Scott Greer is Professor in the Departments of Urban Affairs and Sociology at the University of Wisconsin, Milwaukee. Prior to this appointment he was affiliated with the prestigious Center for Urban Affairs at Northwestern University as professor of sociology and political science. He is the author of over 40 articles and a dozen books dealing with urban politics and local government transition. His most widely known books include: **The Emerging City: Myth and Reality; Governing the Metropolis;** and **Metropolitics: The Study of Political Culture**. He is a poet with extensive publications and an outstanding teacher, having received the first distinguished teaching award from the Northwestern student governing body in 1968. He has served as a consultant for various government agencies.

Roland R. Renne is the director of the Foreign Trade Study in the Department of Economics and Agricultural Economics at Montana State University. He is president emeritus of Montana State University. Dr. Renne has blended decades of experience as both scholar and activist in the Montana political scene. His important work, **The Government and Administration of Montana** is a primary source of information on Montana politics. He gained a national reputation with his analysis of the unique county manager form of government in Petroleum County.

Frank M. Bryan is head of the Department of Political Science at Montana State University. He came this past year from St. Michael's College in Vermont where he was a close observer of the New England town meeting form of government. He is the author of over a dozen articles dealing with local government and a book entitled **Yankee Politics in Vermont**. For two consecutive years, he received the St. Michael's College senior appreciation award for superior teaching.

Dorothy Eck currently serves Montana as the State-local Coordinator in the Governor's office. She deals with problems of local government on a day-to-day basis as head of the Governor's Towns of Tomorrow project. As a delegate to the 1972 Montana constitutional convention she witnessed firsthand the emergence of the voter review in the local government article. She has been active for years in citizen group politics, especially the efforts of the League of Women Voters to modernize government.

THE FUTURE OF MONTANA LOCAL GOVERNMENT

McKinsey: The new Montana constitution requires each of Montana's cities, towns, and counties to review its present form of government. This November [1974] over 600 citizen-delegates will be elected to local study commissions. Like small constitutional conventions they will consider the strengths and weaknesses of their present form of government and consider the possible advantages of an alternative form. Again, in 1976, the voters will choose whether to retain their present form of government or to adopt an alternative recommended by the study commission.

Montana's local government review requirement is unique in the entire nation; Montana is the only state which requires this of all its local governments. What was the intent of the constitutional convention in designing the voter review requirement and where did the idea come from?

Eck: I think the intent of the constitutional convention delegates, or at least a good many of them, was to do just exactly what was done. I looked back over my notes the other day—notes that I had made as a candidate for election—and I found that two things ran through them rather consistently. One was the importance of citizen participation in the process of government, especially at the local level where this is most possible. The other one was making local government more accountable, removing the legislative restrictions that have prevented local governments from carrying on with any initiative or being able to solve their problems. Now I think that as this worked out in the convention, other factors entered in. One of them is the fact that we all realized rather deeply, after reading the material that was prepared for us, that Montana cities and counties had had some very good opportunities since 1922 to change their form of government. There was a constitutional amendment that would allow local governments and counties to come up with a new form of government, to vote on it and to present it to the legislature for approval. And I think that the legislature was reasonable enough and would have gone for this. But no one did this. We only had one county that adopted a county-manager form. We really felt that it was important for the same kind of attention to be focused on local government that we had had the opportunity to focus on state government. I think it was our intent to come up with the voter review article that we did.

McKinsey: The constitution, in this local government article that we are talking about, does **force** review on the local communities. Does this mean that change itself is also forced on these local communities?

Eck: No. A local government commission can ask to have an alternative form placed on the ballot and still not recommend that it be accepted. In other words, they might say, "Of all of the alternatives available to us we think this would be the best alternative, but we still like our own better." Now I don't really think that very many will do that. But there is no change that is going to be forced on local government without the vote of the people. It does force the people to evaluate what they have, and to consider some of the alternatives that they might accept.

McKinsey: Would you argue then that review would be a success even if governments were not changed, even if each community decided to retain and ratify the present form?

Eck: Well, I wouldn't really. I think that all of us would be very much disappointed if all of the communities of Montana decided they wanted to keep the same forms they have now. I don't think that will happen. However, I think that there are some communities that will look at all of the alternatives, at the alternative that is proposed on the ballot, and then decide to keep what they have. I think those communities will have benefited from going through the process. It is very unfortunate in Montana today that very few people understand how their local governments work. They don't know where the strengths are and where the weaknesses and the problems are. In talking with mayors and county commissioners this is one of their frustrations: people don't understand what they are up against. There are even complaints that hardly any legislators understand local government and yet the legislators are the ones that establish many of the restrictions and limitations on local government.

McKinsey: There is now a lot of interest in the state concerning local government review and also in the nation as a whole. Was this an important topic of the constitutional convention or was it kind of an afterthought?

Eck: I think it was one of the important topics that led to having the constitutional convention to begin with. There has been much dissatisfaction with the restrictions on local government. But actually, during the convention itself, the local government article

was one of the very last to come up. There wasn't a lot of debate. There had been another proposal which was so radical that the proposal that was finally accepted was considered to be very conservative. The other proposal incidentally would have created 12 counties for the whole state which would have meant restructuring everything rather like the borough system in Alaska.

McKinsey: Fifty-five of Montana's 56 counties have the same form of county commission government, and 123 of 126 incorporated municipalities have the same mayor-council plan, yet the state has become increasingly more diversified. Why do you suppose the forms of local government in Montana have remained so similar, so uniform, despite this growing diversity?

Renne: Well, first of all people don't give up their institutions very easily or very quickly. Traditionally most of our people came from areas where the present form of local government predominated. As a result, we have had these same arrangements over a good many years—from 1889 to 1974. We are a young state, relatively speaking, but very firm in our traditional habits. Second, there were other adjustments that we had to make in Montana. Beginning right after World War I, the tremendous changes in price levels followed by drought, depression, and grasshoppers in the early 30's brought about problems that were on a much larger scale in the mind of the average farmer and, I think, the average townsperson and most of our Montana citizens. These changes hit the pocket book much harder than the taxes which we were paying under our general property tax levies for the support of local government, whether for county or city or both. There wasn't an economic impetus to do very much about it. I think the population changes that have occurred in the last two decades have changed the emphasis. The 1970 census showed that 41 of the 56 counties lost population, eight of them in very large amounts. We are beginning to think a little more about these things. At the same time, our old traditional habits and the fact that we know most of the people in the courthouse—many of them not only our friends but some of them our relatives—creates built-in resistance.

McKinsey: Given this pull of tradition in Montana, in what kinds of communities do you predict we will see the most changes in local government as a result of this voter review? Is it in those fluctuating communities with population gain or population loss?

Renne: I think where there are the most economic and social

changes we will likely get at least a point of view that would be more flexible and more inclined to change than where there are not such definite and significant changes.

McKinsey: You began as far back as the 1940's to advocate the county manager form of government as a realistic alternative. In 1957 you noted that if Montana's counties were all governed by the county manager form we could expect a savings of $8-$10 million in revenues or up to 15 mills on the annual property tax base in the state. How do you stand by that evaluation today?

Renne: That would be a very low figure today. Everything else is much higher and, actually, I think the savings would be close to double that, if not double.

McKinsey: The manager system operates in Petroleum County which is Montana's most rural or most nearly rural county. Is it a viable alternative for an urban county, like Missoula County?

Renne: Yes, I would be inclined to think that this would be **more** viable in an urban county than in a strictly rural one. Petroleum County had only 675 people. They found themselves in a situation where they could not support the 10 elected officers and the board of county commissioners with the mill levy that was authorized in the state laws. Some counties had consolidated a few offices—mostly minor offices—but here was a county that really could not meet the requirements of the law in terms of the salaries to be paid the officials that they were required to elect under the system. The people voted on the issue and it passed about 3 to 1, a rather significant majority. Since then it has been challenged twice and both times the vote has been favorable to the continuance of the manager form. I think it has been an example of what can be done, even with a small county where some very serious problems have occurred.

McKinsey: Montana certainly is characterized by rural counties but it is characterized by small towns as well. Vermont, next to Alaska, is the most rural state in the country and offers parallels between the New England experience in dealing with ruralization and the Montana trends. Professor Renne noted that 41 of 56 counties in Montana have lost population in the last decade. I think this is true of about two-thirds of the cities and towns as well.

Bryan: It is a little bit hazardous talking about whether the town meeting will work for Montana (having been here only two months). It is always hazardous for a social scientist to predict political

outcomes. There are some parallels however, and, generally speaking, I would have to say that it doesn't appear that town meetings would be valuable in too many areas of Montana. You can come to this conclusion by simply looking at the statistical overview. Montana ruralism is the ruralism of the Great Plains as opposed to the New England ruralism of a kind of scattered pattern. Vermont's ruralism is actually increasing: we had 25 percent more people living in rural places in Vermont in the decade between 1960 and 1970 than we had in the prior decade. In Montana the rural population is declining. A second comparison is that Montana's people are grouped in cities. We have two standard statistical metropolitan areas in Billings and Great Falls and the proportion of the people living in these areas of Montana is 14 to 15 per cent. So what you have is ruralism of space and then clusters of people. That really isn't conducive to the community concept of town hall meetings.

On the other hand, statistics show that Montana always ranks as one of the most participatory states in the Union vis-a-vis voting at the ballot box, voting for president, voting for governor, voting for senator. There is a very strong culture here of participation that, at the local level, might spill over into the town meeting. I think the town meeting is worth it. You can't open a basic text in American politics without the town meeting being held up as a model of participatory democracy. Now it is not perfect, and in Vermont a range of 10 to 50 per cent of registered voters will come to a town meeting. Of those that come, a median of say 32 to 33 per cent get up and say something. But I think it is valuable because it is there: the option for the citizen to go is present.

McKinsey: We have a condition developing in Eastern Montana where ruralization is occuring yet there is the possibility of significant population influx in the coal development areas. Is the town meeting a valid forum for the resolution of conflict between the long term residents and newcomers?

Bryan: I think it is. I qualify this by saying, in New England the town meeting is a part of a long tradition and a social culture. People go to town meetings because of the lunch offered. You meet some of your neighbors you haven't seen all year. So it is a social phenomenon, you have that historical social background. At the same time—this is one of the interesting parallels—we have had a profound debate in Vermont between newcomers and outsiders. Vermont is at the very

back door of 50 million people in the East Coast megalopolis. Montana really hasn't felt that yet. It may, but from which direction it will come we really don't know. But town meetings, I think, serve as a kind of therapeutic device whereby the newcomers and the older people can get in there and get it off their chests. If you are looking for policy and efficiency don't expect too much out of town meetings. The town meeting is people power. People aren't perfect; the town meeting won't be. If you want to adopt town meeting you had better be ready for people to vote down your school bond, to vote down your zoning issue, to express themselves this way.

Greer: But they do that anyway.

Bryan: That's true. But they do it with vehemence in New England town meetings. It's a therapeutic thing. Get it off the chest. I think that is important.

McKinsey: In Montana we tentatively are going to offer a cafeteria style of local government—many choices will be available to local units. Will the outcome, in terms of a change in local government, depend upon the merits of a particular governmental plan itself?

Greer: Well, to begin with we don't know that much about the merits of government plans. They vary for given populations and for the given problems of those populations. But with that very large caveat I would say it is very much the same thing as picking out your candidate in a local or other election. You have to balance two things and trade them off. One is: is this really the guy I want? The other is: is he electable? You may very well end up getting someone whom you don't want who is not electable. What you try for, ideally, is to elect what you want. What typically occurs is that, with whatever sensors you have to the articulate and powerful interests in the community, you begin to tailor a craft that you think will sail. In the process you may very well compromise so much that you end up with a plan that satisfies nobody. The opponents of the plan then organize themselves. You always have a machine to **oppose** the plan. That is the encumbrance. They organize themselves especially if the plan is at all complex and **any** plan will have to be complex. They organize themselves to exploit the ignorance and intellectual laziness of the people in general. I remember seeing a large banner across the street in Richmond, when they were having an annexation referendum. The banner said: "If you don't understand it, vote against it." So I guess that my answer is a qualified, "Yes," except that we have these two things that we have to keep in mind:

can we get the message to people to care to understand it enough to take a position on it? And, what kind of plan will float in this particular community?

McKinsey: You indicate that the dialogure over change does become dichotomized, that two groups emerge. In your book, **Metropolitics**, you contend that most urban reform falls into one of three categories of what you call "morality plays." One is the idea of "throw the rascals out"—get rid of the people in government by changing the form itself. Another one you call "capitalistic realism"—modernize our present government at whatever cost, make it efficient. Horse and buggy type governments have to go. The third you call "progress or decay, our city must choose"—we've got to have a future tax base, this sort of thing.

Greer: A fertility dance, yes.

McKinsey: Do you anticipate that campaign reforms in Montana will become contests between virtue and evil in this sense. Are the good guys and the bad guys going to emerge?

Greer: Well, you see if you have a really serious political issue where its for money and not for blood, the people pro and con will polarize in the course of the campaign. They will do the same thing that Republicans and Democrats do as the November election comes closer. People start out being pretty much a normal curve, a few extremes here and there. This curve begins to separate into two distributions. At one point you might say that Republicans are ethnic enemies of Democrats and vice versa. Now I suspect that this will happen in most cases where it is really for money. On the other hand if it is a very superficial rearrangement of the components it doesn't hurt anybody and you could probably pass it with a low turnout, after which you probably would say, "Was it really worth the exercise?"

McKinsey: Your analysis of metropolitan change focused on various complex communities where you have ethnic differences, religious differences, perhaps greater social differences than we find in Montana. What can we expect in terms of the forces that line up on the side of reform and the side of the status quo in Montana. Is it simply going to be a money issue, is it going to be a tax issue?

Greer: My guess is that it would often be a social rank issue—better yet, education. Apparently, the ordinary guy in Montana, until recently, has been perfectly happy with minimal government. People who are going to be most interested in this are the people who have an extraordinary interest in public affairs and in

government. What I can see is an opposition to change on the part of people that say, "Better the evil that is known. Leave well enough alone." Against this are people who would ordinarily probably go for the capitalist rationalism argument, Professor Renne's argument. For instance, "If we can just put the components together a little differently we can save money and get about the same thing we are getting now." Or "We can get more than we are getting now for the same money we are paying now." That would be my guess knowing very little about the state.

McKinsey: If, as observers, we are going to analyze the ongoing process of the review and we want to be able to anticipate change, what are the kinds of factors that we would look at? What is going to indicate to us when a change is going to be successful?

Greer: You have asked me a very complex question—I don't care how simple or small the community is—because we don't know that much about social change and we usually study it **after** the fact. I would suspect that you would get change where you had a fairly settled population of people who aren't especially concerned about local affairs but who are used to, in effect, delegating their opinions to people whom they respect and whose opinion they will follow. Now, I will back up a little and say that the nature of the objective situation against the political alliance is important. There is the catastrophic theory of social change which says that catastrophe is the mother of innovation. We developed the city-manager plan when the dam broke in Dayton and all of a sudden they realized that nobody was in charge of public business. We had this catastrophe there and it turned out no one was responsible and we invented the manager form. It may be that the extreme dislocation resulting from the rapid movement of people into the eastern mining towns will create real crisis. Sometimes things like overloaded sewers and epidemics have such results. I just don't know. But the objective situation and the political response to it, which can be analytically separated, are both important.

McKinsey: Even in Montana where we have had examples of change in governmental forms it has depended upon a particular, unique situation, some kind of scandal, some kind of problem with money disappearing. Is this a reasonable assumption?

Renne: Yes, in Bozeman 50 years ago they had a very serious financial problem and they turned to the city-manager form of government and they have had it since. But it took a crisis situation to get that sort of reaction.

McKinsey: Is this fair to say about Great Falls?

Eck: I think the situation in Great Falls was partly crisis but also I think that it was partly a long period of real dissatisfaction with the way things were going and real frustration. They had tried various ways to change the present way of operating without changing the form. So, it is somewhat different.

McKinsey: I suppose there is a converse to that: as the new government attempts to operate it might be judged by the way the present occupants work in that setting, rather than on the merits of the governmental form itself. This has been the assessment of what has happened in Missoula in the fifties, for example, when different forms of local government were tried. Is this a pattern in the nation?

Greer: Well, certainly the character of the political actors may influence associations among them. Probably if this is allowed to go unchanged there is going to develop a minimal change in the effective output. On the other hand, if you had a basic change in political form, and it was well known among the people and one they liked, you would expect a shift in actors and in formal association.

Eck: I think sometimes that we are assuming that those who are going to be opposing change will be the present incumbents. I don't think that is really fair. It would be my guess that the governments that change are the governments that have incumbents who know government well enough to want change. In fact both the Association of Counties in Montana and the League of Cities and Towns have taken very strong stands favoring this whole process. The county commissioners have what they call a Committee on the Future and the proclamations they are putting out are far more forward-thinking than any that we're talking about or the legislature has talked about.

Bryan: If it is true that when turnouts are low, that when groups interested in change are able to activate their own people to go to the polls without creating a crisis vote, proposals are more apt to pass, then perhaps the people that are most interested in getting things changed in Montana should actually try to inhibit civic participation. This is an interesting contradiction, given the spirit of the constitution.

Greer: Well, I think there is some merit to that. Thinking about the three metropolitan referendums that I studied on questions of metropolitan government—the turnout in Cleveland was very big and it lost; the turnout in St. Louis was not remarkable and it lost; the

turnout in Dade County (which is Miami and environs) was very, very low and it won. But if you look at the St. Louis data more carefully you find while it was a pretty low turnout, groups that ordinarily don't turn out in this kind of election turned out in disproportionate numbers and they were the ones that really socked it. In Dade County, by the way, the same percentage turned out as had turned out earlier in the referendum to abolish the city of Miami. The city of Miami was saved by 800 votes, 26 per cent of the population turned out to vote on it.

McKinsey: What are the consequences of holding the election, the referendum on the new form of government, in 1976 at the general election rather than at a special election? Will this have a tendency to mobilize people who haven't thought about the forms of government, but who mark the ballot anyway? Is there some wisdom in having a special election in terms of getting the influentials there, the people that really understand the problem?

Bryan: I wouldn't say that influentials are all going to understand problems. There are probably a lot of people who will understand the problems better than the influentials. But I do think it is kind of a contradiction and I was thinking about Professor Greer's study of Dade County. If that correlation is true, then I think holding elections at the time of the general election is going to be painful for those who want a lot of change. A lot of people who go to the polls are going to vote "No" because they don't understand. I think the heroic efforts of the people at the state level, Dorothy Eck included, in trying to get this out, are important. But I am wondering if your optimism about the change is policy or if you really believe it is going to happen? Is it tactical or substantive?

Eck: I think it is experience. Montana has been through a few years of change that have been considered to be rather miraculous. To begin with, we went through executive reorganization. Everybody knew that that wasn't going to be accepted by the voters, but it was. And what happened with the constitutional convention? It was pretty close in the end, but, it was accepted. We are going through a period, I think, where people are probably more concerned and have more interest in the political issues than they have had in the past and it probably is easier to sustain that interest over a short period of time than spread it out over years. I realize that a presidential election is going to be a tough one. On the other hand, you are going to get more people out to vote. There are going to be more people

participating, and you might say that unless those people really do want a change, there shouldn't be one now.

Renne: Of course these county and city commissions will have a great deal to do about the campaign. They will be very important to the outcome.

Eck: There are also a lot of people in Montana who really know a little about campaigning. I can remember working with the League of Women Voters when this whole process of the constitutional convention began. We had a conference to get our people organized and we had some good advice from Tom Judge. He told us we should not approach people as an intellectual elite but to get into the schools and shopping markets where people are, and to learn to present the message so that it could be understood. I think the same thing is going to be true in this case. Unless people can put their message, the pros and cons of the alternative they are going to present, in a context that the ordinary person—who doesn't read in depth on issues—can understand, it's not going to win and it probably shouldn't.

McKinsey: This leads to a question concerning another apparent contradiction. Why was review placed in the constitution? Isn't this a stiff and strict imposition in the local government Article which otherwise is very flexible and promotes local self-determination?

Eck: Yes, we have been critized for that. On the other hand, if you think about self-determination and what it is for a person or a government, you have to be objective and look at all the alternatives. In other words, the options have to be there in front of you. I don't think this would happen without some really radical action, such as required here. It is a contradiction and I think that we realized that when it was done. And I think that the local governments realize it and they are very strong on this point of not having the legislature—or the constitution—impose any more requirements on them than would be absolutely necessary.

McKinsey: Professor Greer, doesn't the experience of change in the nation suggest that success does depend on a lot of initiative at the state level and sometimes even action by state legislatures. In Canada we know that governmental reorganization is imposed at the provincial level.

Greer: Yes, the Dade County experience is probably the most relevant here. The first thing that they had to do was to go to the state legislature and get something crafted that would allow them to move

at all. This was made very easy because the state legislative delegation from Dade County was sick of having to operate as a city council. It had to carry special bills into Tallahassee every session and, therefore, could be blackmailed by the upstate counties. After this was won, it really gave the impetus to the whole thing. I would say that your work probably is the beginning of some point of change way down here at the municipal level.

This is not the same thing as the actions taken in Ontario where with a somewhat different constitution they were simply able to hold hearings of the provincial parliament. After the members of parliament made up their minds they just said, "All right, people, you are integrated, there is now a greater level of government at work."

Renne: These local commissions elected by the people in the community and the county would, it seems to me, have quite some influence.

Greer: They also should be working for it and they will have, what, a year to campaign?

McKinsey: Probably much less time than that to campaign; basically a year and a half to do the whole job.

Greer: I think if you could persuade people to vote—even if they weren't terribly concerned—and in the process they came on this item and they were vaguely familiar with it they might say, "In for a penny, in for a pound. If I'm going to come in, I'm going to vote on everything." This is the way I do it if I'm going to trudge down to the polls. If I have any kind of considered opinion, I'll vote.

McKinsey: Given the past record of public disinterest in change—alternative forms have been available to Montana voters in the past—what leads us to believe that this imposed review is really going to make a difference? Citizens are given a major responsibility here, are they up to it?

Renne: I would say **relevance.** If a local city commission or a county commission makes a report recommending certain changes in that county's or city's government, it is quite a different thing from being passed down by the legislature. Having elected these people locally they almost have an obligation to stand behind them.

Bryan: As a footnote, I think an easterner's view of western populism is that it is participatory. I come from the area of the world where we are supposed to have the greatest participatory system, yet I find the ethic of the individual having the say very profound in Montana. It is here, you can cut it with a knife. I see it everywhere. I

see it in my classes. The students believe that the individual does count, and that may work.

McKinsey: We are getting into this area of citizen involvement. I would like to quote from a book that Professor Bryan has written and from another book that Professor Greer has written. Professor Bryan says, ". . . more and more urbanologists are turning to the New England town meetings for clues to the variables that shape and define authentic citizen involvement." Professor Greer says, "At the local level the average citizen has his major opportunity to control his collective fate." I would like to ask both of these distinguished academicians whether they really believe that the average citizen cares about being involved or does he simply want things to run smoothly at the local government level? Does he want it to be public administration and not politics?

Bryan: My reaction is for the most part, "No, he doesn't want to become actively involved." A healthy political system, I think, is one in which he doesn't have to be. Low voting totals sometimes signal, to go back to the Almond and Verba kinds of work, a good healthy on-going system.

McKinsey: What do you mean by low?

Bryan: Well, a lot of people claim that, in off-year elections, the fact that between 58 and 66 per cent of Americans generally go to the polls, hurts the system. The more participation you have, the healthier the system is. I don't think that correlation is sound. What's critical is that the citizen can, if he wants to, if the issue does involve his life, participate and have a weight.

Greer: Well, the recent studies in the Bay Area where Heinz Eulau and Kenneth Prewitt studied the politics of the various cities—I think they had about 80 cities, including real cities, and an awful lot of suburbs—took two dimensions. One was: how much turnout do you get at the elections? the other was: how often do you throw the incumbents out? Out of this they created a little typology. There was the volatile situation in which everybody comes and you throw them out. They thought that was participatory democracy. The exact opposite is, nobody comes and you don't throw them out. They didn't like that. Another one is where everybody comes and you don't throw them out; they considered that to be really very, very bad. My feeling is that that is what we really want. That is, a supportive electorate which seriously considers and then decides it likes the present situation all right. This, I think, is the most that we

can expect. Those weren't great turnouts but they were substantial. They were the result of real political craftsmanship and involvement on the part of the leadership, which is something we just can't leave out. You could activate people who ordinarily are perfectly satisfied with the way things are going but it takes political art. It takes craft.

McKinsey: Montana is, perhaps, the first state to really follow in the Jeffersonian spirit of a periodic review of government in order to insure that government matches the needs of new generations. Is the mandated ten year periodic voter review requirement in the Montana constitution a good idea?

Renne: Well, I think at intervals there should be this type of review.

Greer: Everyone is going to be watching it, at least people for whom this is the central question.

Eck: I think that Montana's local government article was probably the strongest one available and that we have the machinery in process. I think that the staff that is working with the State Commission on Local Government is a tremendously capable staff. It really comes down now to whether we do get the kind of participation we need at the local government level from local citizens. I think that very few people in Montana really are aware of the fact that this is indeed a very historic period, not only for us but for the whole concept of local government.

McKinsey: If we fail here—I don't know what the definition of failure is—will there still be interest? In other words, will this be a model **only** if there are a lot of Montana cities and counties that do indeed change their form of government.

Greer: Well, it will be an extremely interesting public experiment from the point of view of social scientists. If some communities change and some don't, then immediately you start trying to find out why. I would say that it will be important if the results indicate that you had interested a large number of people, and in some degree informed an even larger number of people, and if you had a few experimental changes which other people are then going to be wanting. Citizens in other communities will have some kind of stake in this even if they love things the way they are. They are going to be looking over at Bozeman, Billings. How in the world will that work out? In 10 years, it may turn out that it worked out superbly and the other communities are in worse trouble than ever. That's the beauty of the 10-year review. You can learn from experience. It's the only way that we will really persuade most people.

McKinsey: I think we are all in agreement that a critical variable is to move the level of awareness and discussion to the consciousness of the ordinary citizen? How can this be done? How can we take this out of the circle of the elite and influentials who know what is going on and move it to this level? How can we, for example, in a televised forum, actually speak to the people who are going to be making that decision in 1976?

Bryan: I think this approach is one of two methods. You can go from the top down. That's what I think this forum is. Most people may turn this program off. I think probably the best way is to go from the grass roots up through the educational system, especially in rural areas. There is no better way to stimulate civic interest than through the school system. I think there is a danger with the from-the-top-down approach—the same kinds of people go to the meetings; the same kinds of people show up at all the forums and workshops; it never really gets out of that elite syndrome.

Eck: There is one interesting thing that has happened. We have the Montana Advisory Committee for Children and Youth—half of the members are adults and half youth—who are interested in the concerns of youth.They have really picked up this whole issue and see it as the way of getting youth involved in local government. They are going around to the hearings recommending that one of the concepts that should be written in—or considered at a later time by governments—is that they have at least two youth members on each of the local government boards and commissions. I think that the influence of these young people is great. They have encouraged a lot of people to run for this commission. I don't know if anyone has done a survey of how many people under 25 are running, but I bet there are quite a few.

McKinsey: There are a number of cases where younger people did file. This was the impetus to get other people in the community to decide, "We certainly aren't going to leave our fate in their hands." This happens in many cases, where one group mobilizes and then stimulates emergence of another. Maybe that's what we need. Maybe a greater dialogue is necessary; make this a political contest. We can't avoid politics. It's reality.

Renne: We have to remember that in many Montana areas the sparsity of population is really a rather serious problem in getting that kind of unity on an issue. But, I think it can be done through the means we have with the newspapers, extension services, and state

government, and these special committees that have been elected within the counties and the cities.

Greer: I think the local radio stations are a great resource. They are always always looking for something to fill up time.

Eck: In most sparsely populated areas—even though it might be more difficult to get speakers out there—when you have something going on in those communities, people show up.

Renne: They respond much better than the cities. But it takes a little bit of work to get a program organized and out to them.

McKinsey: How do you make this local government review interesting? Is it inherently interesting? If I said that local government review is going to mean that we are all going to cut our property taxes in half, I'm pretty sure that we would have a high level of interest and involvement. But we know that that is probably a lie. What is it that is compelling about this review? What is it that is going to bring people out? In the final analysis, will Montanans show that the only thing they want is the least government at least cost?

Eck: Of course, what they are going to get—and what I think they already know they are getting—is a lot more responsibility and authority at the local level. This may increase the interest in the whole process. We have seen this in the last few months' discussion of State Institutions. There is talk now about community-based programs, with the community assuming responsibility for taking care of these people. I was in Plentywood last week where the city council members work two or three hours a day on their own time because their work load has increased so much. They are going to be looking for a way to alleviate their problems.

Greer: One Federal government policy for helping communities to develop is the revenue sharing policy which throws all these intricate problems back on the state and the county which are not presently structured or equipped to handle them.

McKinsey: We can conclude on a note of consensus: the individual study commissions have two years of complex challenges ahead of them. The Bicentennial theme of 1976 in Montana may be Local Government Review.